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LETTER

TO THE

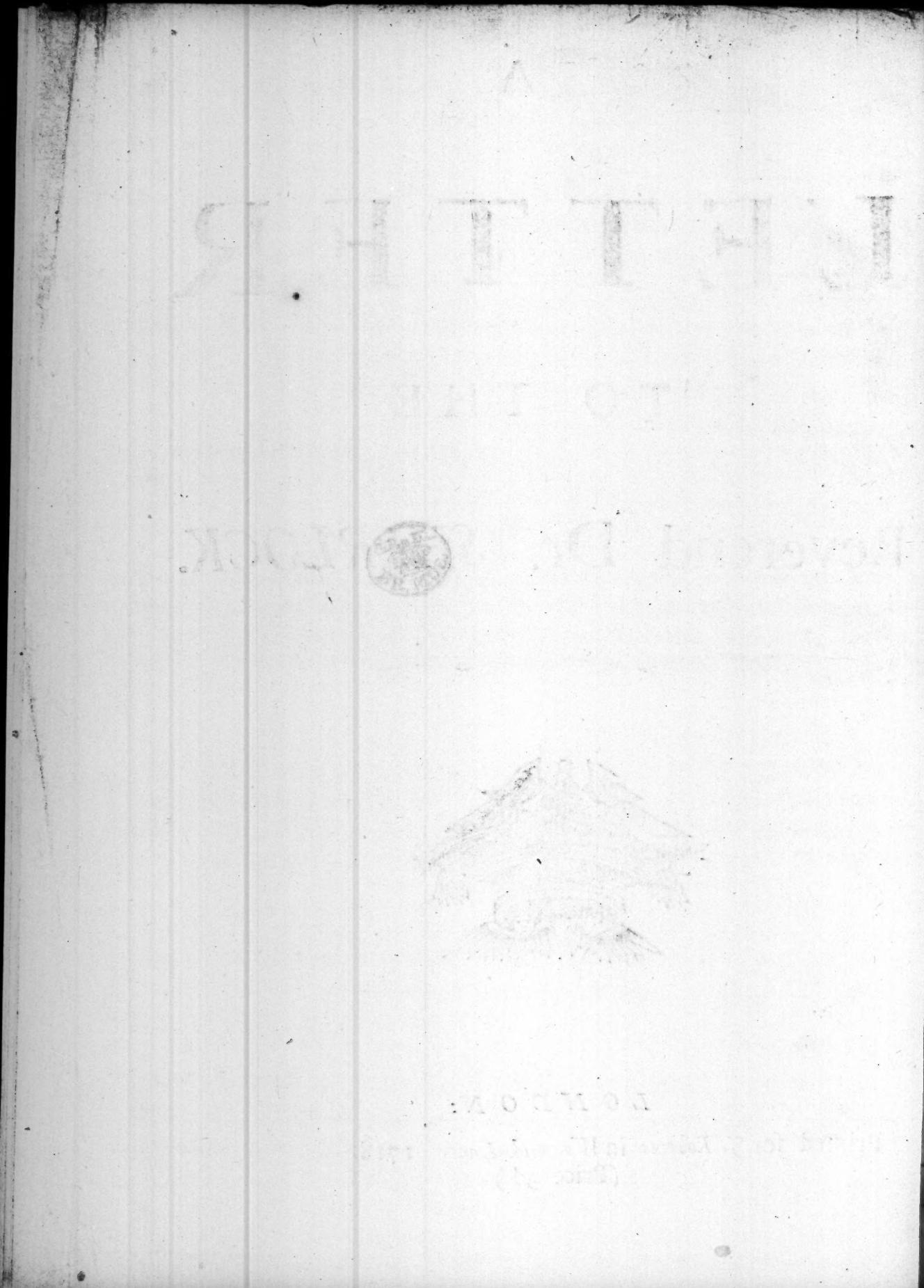
Reverend Dr. *SHERLOCK*.



Theat bind 18

L O N D O N:

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Reverend Sir,

IN your last Pamphlet intituled, *The Condition and Example of our blessed Saviour vindicated, &c.* P. 55, 56, 57, 58. you say that ‘ his Lordship (the Bishop of Bangor) not content to oppose what is wrong, suffers his Zeal to carry him into very unjustifiable Extremes.

‘ Thus :

1. ‘ Because some have laid too much stress upon a regular Succession of the Clergy, and confined the Validity of the Gospel Institutions to it, without allowing for Cases even of Necessity;

‘ Therefore—

‘ His Lordship, not troubling himself to consider what regard ought to be paid to a regular Succession, and what not; calls it *in contempt*, **The Invention of Men, Wain Words, Niceties, Trifles, Dreams.**

2. ‘ Because some have claimed such a Power of Excommunication as is indeed inconsistent with the Terms of the Gospel, and the Reason of Man;

‘ Therefore,

‘ His Lordship, not concerning himself to shew the true Use of Excommunication in the Church of Christ, and thereby

‘ thereby to shut out all false Claims; exhorts all
 ‘ Christians to act, without any regard to the Out-
 ‘ cries of human terror, or the solemn denuncia-
 ‘ tions of any Men upon Earth; and represents
 ‘ human benedictions, human absolutions, human
 ‘ denunciations, human excommunications, as
 ‘ human engines permitted to work for a while (like
 ‘ other evils) by Providence.

3. ‘ Because some claim an unwarrantable Power to
 ‘ the Governours in the Church, over particular Members.

‘ Therefore,
 ‘ His Lordship, not endeavouring to frown the just li-
 ‘ mits of Church Power; declares there is no Power in
 ‘ the Church, That no one of Christ’s Subjects, more
 ‘ than another, hath authority — to judge, censure,
 ‘ or punish the Servants of another Master, in
 ‘ matters relating purely to Conscience and Sal-
 ‘ vation.

4. ‘ Because some claim an unjustifiable Authority
 ‘ to impose Articles of Faith, and their own Interpretations
 ‘ of the Scripture for such, on the Christian People.

Therefore,

‘ His Lordship, not considering that many Christians
 ‘ cannot read, that more of them cannot read the Scrip-
 ‘ tures without an interpreter, affirms, with respect to
 ‘ all Christians equally, That the Scriptures in neces-
 ‘ sary Points NEED NO INTERPRETER.

5. ‘ Because the Authority of the Magistrate in mat-
 ‘ ters of Religion has been often abused; and Persecutions
 ‘ have been carried on by the pretence of it.

‘ Therefore,

‘ Therefore,

‘ His Lordship, not endeavouring to state the just limits of the Civil Authority in this Matter; affirms, that there is no such Authority, and that if any Men upon Earth have a right to add to the Sanctions of Christ’s Laws—they are so far Kings in his stead, and reign in their own Kingdom, and not in his, t. e. as he explains it himself in his Sermon, they so far take Christ’s kingdom out of his hands, and place in their own.

6. ‘ Because it had been urged to the Bishop, that Temporal Encouragements, when rightly applied, do promote true Religion.

‘ Therefore,

‘ His Lordship, rather than allow Temporal encouragements, when applied in the best manner, to be of any service to true Religion, frames a NEW definition of Religion, on purpose to throw out Temporal encouragements, and affirms, That the Belief of another World is what alone renders our best actions, Religion from whence they flow; and from whence, when they do not flow, they cease to be Religion.

How very unjustifiable Extreames soever you, and most of the Clergy may call his Lordship’s Opinions; yet most of us Laymen are so fully satisfied with his Lordship’s Reasons, particularly in his answer to the Report, that we are so far from thinking them very unjustifiable Extreames, that we think them very justifiable and sound Doctrines. Who those S O M E are, I suppose you can best tell. But I do not in the least wonder, that you

should call them very unjustifiable Extremes, who, in your Report, and other late Pamphlets have maintain'd some Doctrines that savour very much of Popery; and therefore must dislike every Doctrine that asserts the Liberty of the Laity against Spiritual and Church Tyranny.

If these Opinions of my Lord of Bangor seem to you to be very unjustifiable Extremes, I believe you will be at a loss what to call the four following Propositions, which, I think, I can maintain.

First ; That a regular uninterrupted Succession of the Clergy is in no wise necessary to make them Successors to the Apostles as to the Doctrines the Apostles taught.

Secondly ; That tho' a regular uninterrupted Succession of the Clergy could be demonstrated ; yet that the Clergy cannot succeed the Apostles in the Powers they were invested with ; and that what Power soever the Clergy have, they have it from the LAWS OF THE LAND ONLY.

Thirdly ; That the Validity of all those Actions, that the Clergy claim as belonging to them Jure Divino, doth not depend upon their being done by such an Order of Men, but upon another account, whereby they would be as Valid if done by a Lay-Man.

Lastly ; That the Ordination of the Clergy is but a Legal not Divine Qualification to baptize, administer the Sacrament, pray, &c.

First, That a regular uninterrupted Succession of the Clergy is in no wise necessary to make them Successors to the Apostles as to the Doctrines the Apostles taught.

To make a Man a Successor to the Apostles **as to the Doctrines** the Apostles taught, *in my poor opinion*, it is only necessary that he teach the same Doctrines they taught; for if he teach a Doctrine contradictory to theirs, he is *not then* their Successor **in point of Doctrine**; if he teach a Doctrine they *never* taught, he is *then* a Teacher of a *New* Doctrine, and *not* their Successor. And it is very plain by the Church of *Rome*, who pretends she can trace the **Succession** of her Clergy **uninterruptedly** up to the Apostles, but teaches *at the same time* Doctrines repugnant to those the Apostles taught, that the Clergy may be in a **regular uninterrupted Succession** from the Apostles, and yet *not* teach the Doctrines the Apostles taught: So that a **regular uninterrupted Succession** of the Clergy is *in no wise* a necessary Qualification for them to preach the same Doctrines the Apostles taught, or any Proof that they do so: But **Sincerity**, *in my poor opinion*, is the *chiefest*, if not the **only** Qualification to make a Man teach the Doctrines the Apostles taught, and *so* their Successor.

Secondly, **That tho a regular uninterrupted Succession of the Clergy could be demonstrated; yet that the Clergy cannot succeed the Apostles in the Powers they were invested with; and that what Power soever the Clergy have, they have it from the LAWS OF THE LAND ONLY.**

As to the first part of this Proposition, **That tho a regular uninterrupted Succession of the Clergy could be demonstrated, yet that the Clergy cannot succeed the Apostles in the Powers they were invested with:** Surely the Clergy will not presume to succeed the Apostles in those extraordinary Powers our Saviour invested them with at his

his Ascension into Heaven, as the * Fathers did, *Mark Ch. 16. v. 16, 17, 18. In my name they shall cast out Devils, they shall speak with new tongues, they shall take up Serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them, they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover*; for these Powers were given them that the Gospel might thereby be propagated the speedier, and the Heathen be induced the sooner to embrace it, and therefore were **only temporary**, as the Experience of about sixteen hundred years demonstrates, Miracles having ceased so long ago: But if the Clergy will pretend to these Powers, let them shew they are invested with them, by doing what our Saviour impowered the Apostles to do, and we of the Laity will submit: If they cannot shew this, they must not take it ill if we deny them those Powers.

As to the other part of the Proposition, *That what Power soever the Clergy have, they have it from the LAWS OF THE LAND ONLY*: This seems to me to be but a necessary Consequence of the former part; for if the Clergy receive no Powers from the Apostles, and yet they are invested with Powers, they must consequently receive them from the **Laws of the Land ONLY**, because they can receive them from nothing else: And this is so undeniably, that it would be loss of time to go about to prove it; for the Power of the Convocation, of the Archbishop down to the Curate, and of the Ecclesiastical Courts is by the **Laws of the Land ONLY**.

Thirdly, *That the Validity of all the Actions that the Clergy claim as belonging to them Jure Divino, doth not depend upon their being done by such an Order of Men, but*

* An Inquiry, pt. 2. p. 68, 69.

upon another account, whereby they would be **as Valid** if done by a **Lay-Man**.

Baptizing, administering the Sacrament and Praying publickly are the three principal Actions, which none but the Clergy are permitted to do: But the **Validity** of all these actions depends not in the least upon their being done by a **Clergyman**, but **ONLY** upon the **due Preparation and Disposition** of him to whom Baptism and the Sacrament are administered, and the **devout heart** of him who prays. Thus where a grown up Person is baptized, his being made a *Christian* depends upon his **previous Belief** of the Gospel; for tho he were baptized, yet if he believes not he would be no *Christian in the sight of God*; for he who **first believeth, and after that is baptized** shall be saved, and *not* he who **only is baptized**, but doth **not believe**: Thus where a Man receiveth the Sacrament, if he come not with a due preparation of mind, tho an *Archbishop* give him the Bread and Wine, yet *she receives not thereby any benefit of the Death of our Saviour*: Thus the Acceptableness of the Prayers that the Minister puts up for the Congregation depends **ONLY** upon the **Devoutness of his heart**, and upon **NOTHING else**.

If the **Validity** of these Actions depends **ONLY** upon the **Preparation and Disposition** of him to whom they are done, or the **devout heart** of him who doth them, as it is plain it doth; Why would not these Actions be, **to all intents and purposes, as Valid** if done by a **Lay-Man**, if the **Laws** of the Land did not hinder **Laymen** from doing them? As the **Cause** of the **Validity** of these Actions demonstrates a **Layman** might do them, if the **Laws** of the Land did not forbid it; So

matter of Fact demonstrates a Layman hath done, and validly too, what the Clergy claim a Divine Right to. Thus St. *Athaniasius*, whilst a Boy, baptized other boys, and this Baptism was held valid: Thus in the Infancy of Christianity, among the Jewish Converts, when they celebrated the *Passover*, and other Festivals, which was always done in their private houses, and never in the Temple or Synagogues, the Master of the Family invited his Kindred, Neighbours and Friends to Supper; at the close of which the Master of the Feast distributed among his Guests, small pieces of Bread, and having first drunk of the Cup, delivered it to be handed about; Which was accompanied with Thanks to God for having created the Bread and Wine, which was followed by a Hymn suitable to the occasion of the Feast, together with the Remembrance of Christ's Sufferings, he having ordered his Disciples, that as often as they celebrated such Festivals, to commemorate his Death: And among the Gentile Converts, at their *Love Feasts*, where the Rich, according to ancient Custom invited the Poor, at the close of them, the Bread and Wine were carried round to all the Company, which was likewise accompanied with a Thanksgiving to God for all his Mercies, particularly for that of having given his only Son our Saviour to die for the Sins of Mankind: Thus * Laymen formerly preach'd, and when one Bishop was offended at it, two other Bishops justified it as lawful, and confirmed it by several Presidents: Thus some Masters of Families, who, tho they have no Chaplain, yet might easily have one, pray in their Families, and I never yet heard that it was sinful for them so to do: And where is the Difference, in the thing it self exclusive of all human Laws, between praying in and for a Congregation in one place, and praying in and for a Congregation in another,

* Grotius in his Discourse, *An semper communicandum per Symbola.*

† An Inquiry, &c. pt. 2. p. 15.

for he who prays in and for a Congregation, prays publickly as to that Congregation be it where it will; and * and where two or three are gathered together in Christ's Name there is he in the midst of them: Thus Laymen visit the Sick, and pray by them; and this always allowed to be good and valid.

Lastly, That the Ordination of the Clergy is but a Legal, not Divine Qualification to baptize, administer the Sacrament, pray, &c

This Proposition is but a Conclusion drawn from the other three Propositions; for if a Clergyman who teaches the same Doctrine the Apostles taught, tho he be not in a regular uninterrupted Succession from the Apostles, is yet compleatly their Successor in point of Doctrine: If the Clergy don't succeed the Apostles in the Powers they were invested with; and that all the Powers the Clergy have, they have them from the Laws of the Land ONLY: And if a Layman can as validly do what the Clergy claim a Divine Right to do, as the Clergy themselves: What Conclusion then can be drawn, but what I have drawn, viz. That the Ordination of the Clergy is but a Legal, not Divine Qualification to baptize, administer the Sacrament, pray, &c.

Before I conclude, it is necessary to mention one thing, or else the omission of it would be a handle for you to make a terrible Outcry against me; tho I should have meant and intended it, tho I had not mention'd it: And it is this, That tho I have now endeavoured to prove that the whole Body of the Clergy doth, *in all respects whatsoever*, depend on the Laws of the Land as much as the Lawyers, Physicians, &c. Yet that I am entirely against allowing a Liberty to every person to baptize, administer

* Mat. Chap. 18. v. 20.

the Sacrement, pray, &c. because it would breed great Confusion, and introduce very fatal Inconveniences; and therefore that it is very proper that those Actions should be done by the Clergy only, as having made Church matters and Divinity their Study; as pleading at the Bar is the Priviledge of the Lawyers; practising Physick that of the Physicians, because they having made Law and Physick their Studies, are presumed better qualified therein than others.

I doubt not, Sir, you will still exclaim against these Propositions as destructive to *Religion*, by taking away the Divine Right of the Clergy, and making them a **Creature of the Laws of the Land**: But I think it will be the easiest thing in the World to make the direct contrary appear, viz. that it will be an effectual means to

Tim Ch. 2. v. 12. bring mankind to * live soberly, righteously,

and godly in this present world, or in other

Words, to make mankind be religious inwardly, and in the sight of God: And I do affirm that your Proposition, that my Lord of Bangor's Definition of Religion is a NEW DEFINITION OF RELIGION, is entirely, to ALL INTENTS AND PURPOSES, DESTRUCTIVE of ALL RELIGION; I repeat it again, that your Proposition, that my Lord of Bangor's Definition of Religion is a NEW DEFINITION OF RELIGION, is entirely, TO ALL INTENTS AND PURPOSES, DESTRUCTIVE of ALL RELIGION.

I will give you no further trouble at present, but will subscribe my self,

Middle Temple,
Feb. 13. 1717-18.

Reverend Sir,

your humble Servant

F I N I S.

H. B.